

SKYLINES AND HORIZONS

*DU BOSE HEYWARD*

BY THE SAME AUTHOR:  
(WITH HERVEY ALLEN)

CAROLINA CHANSONS.

# SKYLINES AND HORIZONS

BY

DUBOSE HEYWARD

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*WB*

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TO MY MOTHER



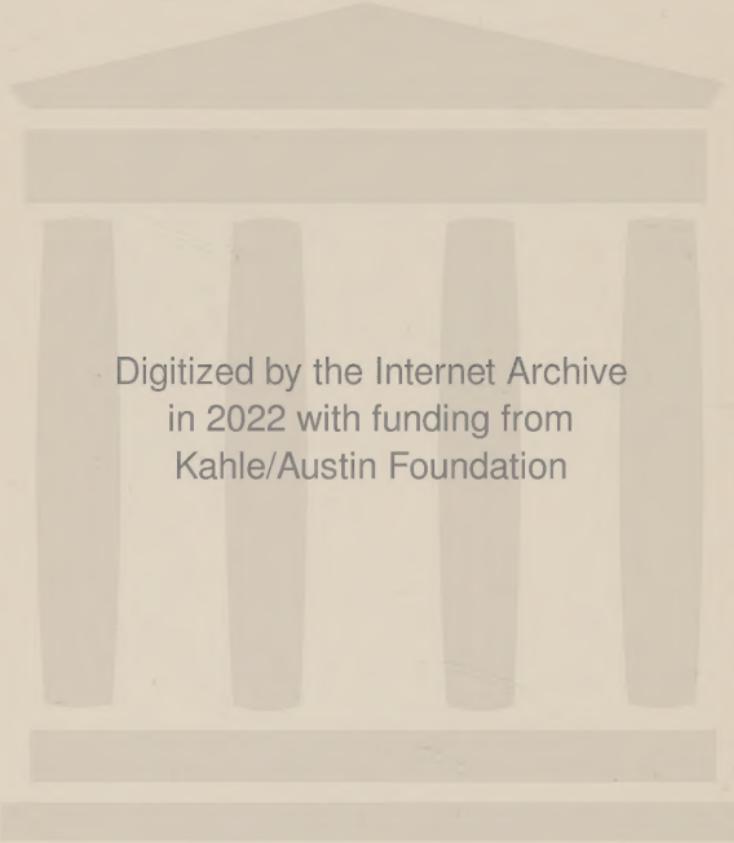
## YOUR GIFTS

**Y**OU could not give me toys in those bleak days;  
So when my playmates proudly boasted theirs,  
You caught me to the shelter of your arms,  
And taught me how to laugh away my tears.  
Having no books, you sang a shining word  
Into my open palm, and closed it tight.  
And some far God of Little Children heard,  
And gave you of His best for my delight.  
So, when the neighbors' children shouted by,  
Their hired nurse-maids herding them like sheep;  
Then, that old dauntless look of yours would leap,  
And, leading me beneath the western skies,  
You woke their mirrored glory in my eyes.

And there were nights; do you remember still?  
Forgetting playthings we could never buy,  
We journeyed out beyond the farthest hill,  
Adventuring along the evening sky,  
And you would teach the meaning of the stars.  
Not the dull purpose vaguely guessed by sages,  
And catalogued in musty study-books.  
But wild, fantastic legends of lost ages,  
That none but their Creator ever knew,  
And that He whispered only once to one  
Frail, lonely mother—and that mother—you.

*Now autumn years are blowing swiftly by,  
And I come empty-handed from my quest;  
Save for a captured wraith of sunset sky,  
A star or two, and last and loveliest,  
The little shining word you gave to me:  
Treasures no human hand may ever hold.  
But you first knew their wonder and their worth;  
You who have made me rich with more than gold.*

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## SKYLINES AND HORIZONS



## SKYLINES

“Here where the mountains shoulder to the skies.”

Poems written in the Great Smokies of Western North Carolina.



## A YOKE OF STEERS

**A** HEAVE of mighty shoulders to the yoke,  
Square, patient heads, and flaring sweep of  
horn;

The darkness swirling down beneath their feet  
Where sleeping valleys stir, and feel the dawn;  
Uncouth and primal, on and up they sway,  
Taking the summit in a drench of day.  
The night-winds volley upward bitter-sweet,  
And the dew shatters to a rainbow spray  
Under the slow-moving, cloven feet.

There is a power here that grips the mind;  
A force repressed and inarticulate,  
Slow as the swing of centuries, as blind  
As destiny, and as deliberate.

They will arrive in their appointed hour  
Unhurried by the goad of lesser wills,  
Bearing vast burdens on.

*They are the great*

*Unconquerable spirit of these hills.*

## THE MOUNTAIN WOMAN

**A**MONG the sullen peaks she stood at bay  
And paid life's hard account from her small store.  
Knowing the code of mountain wives, she bore  
The burden of the days without a sigh;  
And, sharp against the somber winter sky,  
I saw her drive her steers afield each day.

Hers was the hand that sunk the furrows deep  
Across the rocky, grudging southern slope.  
At first youth left her face, and later, hope;  
Yet through each mocking spring and barren fall,  
She reared her lusty brood, and gave them all  
That gladder wives and mothers love to keep.

And when the sheriff shot her eldest son  
Beside his still, so well she knew her part,  
She gave no healing tears to ease her heart;  
But took the blow upstanding, with her eyes  
As drear and bitter as the winter skies.  
Seeing her then, I thought that she had won.

But yesterday her man returned too soon  
And found her tending, with a reverent touch,  
One scarlet bloom; and, having drunk too much,  
He snatched its flame and quenched it in the dirt.  
Then, like a creature with a mortal hurt,  
She fell, and wept away the afternoon.

## THE MOUNTAIN GIRL

**L**IFE ripens swiftly in these lonely hills,  
Ripens, then hangs long-withered on the bough.  
Out of their ancient hates, relentless wills,  
And unsaid loves, youth burgeons fierce and strong,  
Ready for life when life has scarce begun ;  
Eager to spend its all and then be done.

So, as I gaze at Dorothea now,  
Wind-blown against the cabin's weathered side,  
Defiant, flushed, with bodice blowing wide,  
And rain-soaked homespun skirt that cannot hide  
The bold, strong, ardent curves of womanhood ;  
My exultation winces into pain.

Youth, splendid, careless, racing with the rain,  
Laughing against the storm as it shouts by.  
And yet, perhaps when I pass here again,  
Hid from the beat of weathers, she will be  
One of the sunken, burned-out lives I see  
Here where the mountains shoulder to the sky.

So, as the storm goes smashing down the range,  
Striking white fire from the smitten hills,  
Swelling the falls and streams until it fills  
The cove with giant's music, wild and strange,  
The laugh she sends across the shaken air  
Brings sudden tears ; its very triumph sings

Of beauty so intense it cannot last  
Beyond the transient day of fragile things  
That brush us, like a wind from unseen wings,  
And then are gathered up into the past.

## THE MOUNTAIN PREACHER

IN the red church with checkered window-panes,  
That squats among its cluttered graves, and stains  
The laurelled clearing with its ugly blot,  
He preached his God on Sunday, while the hot  
Thin mountain air vibrated to the sound  
Of hotter threats, and in from miles around,  
Threading still trails through rhododendron gloom,  
Came silent groups to fill his house of doom.

Raw-boned and thunder-voiced, with brandished fist,  
He shouted of an arrant egotist  
Swift to avenge a wrong, carrying hate  
Beyond the grave, hurling a dire fate  
On all who failed to follow his decree.  
Until his God emerged, the Deity  
Behind the mountain feud—the iron code  
Of eye for eye was His. Slowly there showed,  
Behind impassive faces, sullen fear  
Of the all-seeing Foe they worshipped there.

Wednesday the freshet came; and Pigeon Creek,  
That threads the laurel blossoms on a streak  
Of morning sunshine, dropped its slender song,  
Drew one deep breath, then lifting with a long

Slow shudder, hurtled like a tawny beast,  
Froth-lipped and baying, oceanward and east.  
Where the trail leads from church to Garvin's house,  
Tom Garvin's boy was driving up the cows.  
A vaulting seethe of water, trees, and foam  
Lunged for the bank, then curved and tumbled home.  
On yellow chaos, and the sky's hard slate,  
For one swift heart-beat, beauty, slim and straight,  
Swung sharply upward, crumpled, hung and fell:  
There may have been a cry—no one could tell.

That night, ten miles away, the preacher heard.  
The first stream took his horse and rig; the third  
Hurled him a mile down stream and gashed his head.  
A sallow morning light lay on the bed  
At Garvin's when he staggered through the door  
And closed it very softly on the roar  
Of hungry water. Slowly silence grew  
And spread—and suddenly the watchers knew  
There was a God, and He was very kind.  
While the grim, silent man, with eyes gone blind,  
Gathered the broken form that never stirred  
Into his bleeding arms—and said no word.

## THE BLOCKADER \*

**H**E stands, the symbol of the things that were,  
When he, and Daniel Boone, first claimed these  
hills.

Plying his ancient trade above the stir  
Of spreading life, the agony of mills,  
While demagogues herd cattle to the poll  
To break old promises, and while we see  
Stout fibres slacken; in his stubborn soul  
Beats the old, blind desire to be free.

Into the wilderness among the first  
He came. His bloody foot-prints stained the snow  
At Valley Forge. And always like a thirst,  
Freedom to think and do, to come and go,  
Burned in his throat. Unsatisfied with named  
And labelled variants of liberty,  
He kept the stinging essence unashamed;  
Lived, and let live; or died, if that need be.

Behind the granite ramparts of a land  
That no one wanted, still a pioneer,

\* The old mountain distiller, whose fight has been for the principle of personal liberty, has always referred to himself as a "Blockader." He is not to be confused with the post-Volstead "moonshiner."

He broke the forests, fighting hand to hand.  
Then built a home, and hung his rifle there.  
The German knew him, Mexico, and Spain,  
Clear-eyed, untiring, and gaunt. He cares  
As little for the revenue. It's plain  
He's much too primitive for splitting hairs.

Who knows, but when the slate is clean again,  
And wiser generations mock our age;  
When force is spent to free, not shackle, *men*,  
And youth has claimed its ancient heritage;  
Up from the cities, eager pioneers  
Will come invading his old fastnesses,  
And find his children's sons the sturdy heirs  
Of the unchanging, deathless verities.

## BLACK CHRISTMAS

*"It is cruel for a woman with her man gone,  
An' the younguns allus hungry, an' winter comin' on."*

**I** THOUGHT the feud was ended last Christmas Day,  
When Darrell sent the preacher to the Galloways to  
say

That they could come and get him, if they had a mind:  
He was done with rifle-totin' for his fellow-kind.  
An' a year gone by, with everythin' *thet still*;  
An' never once a Galloway on our side the hill.  
Oh I was glad this mornin' when Dal hollered up to me  
To sen' the younguns runnin' to help him fetch a tree.  
"There's a fine young balsam by the wood-house shed,  
An' we'll have it in for Christmas, like we used to do!"  
he said.

I watched him drop the saplin' with a single stroke;  
An' the snow all whirlin' round him like a shinin' smoke;  
While the younguns tumbled, and laughed, and sang:  
Then someone shouted sudden—an' a rifle rang.  
Now the folks are gatherin' to bring him from the shed;  
An' I got to stop denyin' that my man is dead.

## THE MOUNTAIN GRAVEYARD

HIGH on the mountain where the storm-heads are,  
Lying where all may see, there is a place  
As hideous and shocking as a scar  
That mars the beauty of a well-loved face.  
Infinitely drear, and raw, and nude,  
It waits and listens in the solitude.

There is no friendly tree in all that square  
Of scattered stones, and arid, troubled clay.  
Bleak as the creed of those who journey there,  
Hard as the code by which they lived their day,  
It gives them all they ask of it—its best;  
No beauty and no softness—only rest.

But oh, the pity of it all is this:  
They lived with beauty and their eyes were blind.  
Dreaming far strong joys, they came to miss  
Those that were near. So at the last we find  
No tenderness of blossom, but instead  
Mute emblems of the longings of the dead.

These rain-bleached sea-shells in an ordered row  
Tell of an ocean that they never knew

Except in dreams which, through the ebb and flow  
Of years, set seaward as the torrents do.  
Always they planned to follow, knowing deep  
Within their hearts that dreams are but for sleep.

And see these tawdry bits of broken glass  
Which speak the foreign glories of the town—  
The crowds, the lights; these, too, are dreams that pass  
Here where the hemming walls of rock look down,  
And clasp their children fast within their keep  
Until they cradle them at last to sleep.

Yet all the while, if they could only know  
The beauty that is theirs to breathe and touch—  
The whisper of the dawn across the snow,  
The vast, low-drifting clouds that love them much—  
Oh, they could call their dreams home down the sky,  
And carry beauty with them when they die.

## THE MOUNTAIN TOWN

### SPRING

THESE are the days when I can love the town;  
Now, when the year is clean and new and sweet.  
When the great mountain schooners rumble down,  
White-crested, and slow-moving, fleet on fleet,  
Leading a spotted heifer, or a steer,  
A rangy mule or two, a pair of hounds;  
To barter for a flowered calico,  
A ribbon for the red-cheeked daughter's hair,  
And black tobacco for the coming year.  
Now there is laughter in the open square,  
The whine of brakes, and cracking of the whips,  
Loud banter while the old horse-trader's mare  
Is auctioned—old songs vie with older quips.  
The girls go flocking up and down the street,  
A startled wonder in their hill-blue eyes,  
Amazement and delight upon their lips.  
Men, seeming much too large for crowding walls,  
Stride down the street, and answer with a hail  
The greetings of acquaintances they meet.  
Boys strut the pavement in new overalls,  
And trade unendingly in dogs and guns;  
While wagon-hoods frame wan, madonna faces  
That quiver into eager, fleeting smiles,

And there is talk of undiscovered places  
Above the soaring laurel-bordered miles.  
Soon flame-azaleas on the mountain-side  
Will smolder out and die; the laurel-tide  
Will sway and hesitate at Summer's touch.  
Then they will pass, these people that I know,  
And understand a little, and love much.

## THE MOUNTAIN TOWN

### SUMMER

UP from the cities swing the summer crowds.  
Scurrying motors in an endless row  
Shatter the crystal silence as they hurl  
Their freight of restless faces to and fro.  
Fern-bordered, drowsy roads that love to curl  
About the hills, and muse beneath the beat  
Of rhythmic hooves, and lilting sunburnt feet,  
Thunder by day, and volley hurtling lights  
Across the dark, like some gargantuan game.  
On the steep quiet of the circling heights  
Immense hotels blossom among the trees,  
Opening brilliant awnings to the sun,  
Loud with a droning as of many bees.  
Now there are concerts on the little square,  
While, in the heat and dust, crowds come and go.  
The heady jazz beats on the wearied ear,  
Mingled with laughter that is much too shrill.  
Sleek girls in riding breeches saunter near  
With sallow youths. Reiterant the stream  
Of life moves on. Faces float up and gleam,  
And blur, and pass—child faces where the dream  
Still flickers—faces that question life—  
Eyes that give sad answers, yet never know

That they are sad ; and, poignant as a cry,  
Faces that breathe new wonder from the sky,  
While hands that bear the scar of wheel and loom  
Reach after buoyant hours swirling by.  
Now, from wide sun-deep fields, the July haze  
Rises and blurs the town as though to hide  
Its pain, and bring a memory of days,  
Clean, wholesome, sweet, that it has put aside.

## I STUMBLED UPON HAPPINESS

**I** STUMBLED upon happiness once  
In a forgotten cove  
Between impassable ranges.

With eyes the color of great altitudes  
The woman regarded me  
Coolly, dispassionately,  
A lost Martian dropped upon her world;  
Then, with a sudden surge,  
Power, vast, inexhaustible,  
Swept visibly upward,  
Lifted and half-turned  
The splendid young torso,  
Ridged, stiffened, and bunched  
In the clean, straight span of the shoulders;  
Then swung her from me  
Down the raw wound of the furrow,  
One with the rhythm  
That swayed in the heave of her oxen.  
Then came the man,  
Half of a tree on his shoulder,  
And the peace of a nescience,  
Wide and abysmal,  
Like naked sunlight upon him.

Earth had her way with these two.  
Freed of her old weary combat with spirit.  
She had modelled this beautiful flesh,  
Then tuned it to beat with her rhythms;  
Oxen, soil, seed, and human,  
In her old perfect cycle.  
And for joy, she had given  
Strength to sunder, and conquer,  
And take, in the sunlight;  
And the deep solace to be had  
At the hands of a mate  
In the hour of shadows.

I looked upon Egypt  
Before the first pyramid  
Chained flesh to a vision—  
Flesh, untrammelled, resilient,  
Free from erosion of spirit.

“Philosophy—ethics—art”  
He formed the words slowly,  
“No such in these mountains.”

*I stumbled upon happiness once  
In the eyes of a man and a woman  
In a forgotten cove  
Between impassable ranges.*

## EVENING IN THE GREAT SMOKIES

THIS is their moment, when the brimming skies  
Tilt mellow radiance along the wind  
To pour through drowsy valleys, and behind  
Far peaks. Compassionate the mountains rise,  
Dim with the wistful dimness of old eyes  
That, having looked on life time out of mind,  
Know that the simple gift of being kind  
Is greater than all wisdom of the wise.

In this deep moment, hushed and intimate,  
When the great hills lean close and understand,  
While silence broods, and beauty is made plain,  
Children in life's dark house may swing a gate  
That lets into a lucent, ample land  
Where lips struck dumb may learn to sing again.

## OTHER POEMS



## CREATION

(A soldier speaks)

**T**HERE is a holiness upon her as she waits  
Close by the station gates.

All of the forenoon long  
Hastens the restless throng;  
Eyes that seem scarcely to live,  
Faces with nothing to give,  
Swung by the rock of the years  
On to their narrow affairs.

Now women come who draw their skirts aside;  
And negro porters, braced against the tide  
Of beating life, shrug with a smile or sneer  
Seeing her waiting there.

Where the massed shadows crawl  
Out from the soaring wall  
Her face shows drawn and small.  
Only her eyes,  
Somber, remote, and wise,  
Gaze out of æons past  
Over today to the vast  
Dream of tomorrow.

All of Earth's sorrow  
Lies there, and all of Earth's joy;  
And the infinite patience that builds  
While armies destroy.

These others who beat in a tide  
Of turbulent life through the wide  
High gate,  
Perhaps they go seeking their fate.  
She needs but to wait.

What has she to do with the strife!  
Her concern is of life,  
Faint-stirring and small,  
Biding its time till the call  
Of the earth for its child  
Out of its night, to the wild  
Glad urge of its day.  
So, while they go on their way,  
She can wait  
By the gate.

And I, who make of my brain, and my soul, and my  
hand,  
Only a driven machine to depeople a land,  
Turn, as the blind must turn to the warmth of the  
sun,  
Toward one  
Who mutely and steadfastly, up from the night and  
the sod,  
Is shaping a life in the wonderful likeness of God.

## ELEGY

THEY are so sure of you now,  
The loving and cruel and blind.  
You are so frail and small  
Since the light dimmed out of your face.  
Death's ultimate commonplace  
Has given you back to them all:  
Now they can comprehend  
And afford to be kind.

You are so plastic now;  
So submissive and still.  
Your slender, rebellious hands  
Have been folded and hidden away.  
You, who were too brave to pray  
When your soul was scarred by the bands  
That they forged through the years  
On your youth, and your dream, and your will.

They can be generous now,  
They who never have given.  
When they gave you a shaft  
Complacently branded "At Rest,"  
I think that you paused in your quest  
Worlds away, while you laughed  
Your old dauntless laugh  
Through your startled new Heaven.

## MILESTONES

ONCE, in a darkened crowd,  
I heard you laugh;  
And for a moment, once  
I saw you flare  
Warm in the eyes of a friend;  
But when the lights went up,  
And when I looked again,  
You were not there.  
Children have touched me often  
With your hands.  
Death brought you to my bedside  
One black day,  
And, with the lips of an old, sad woman  
You kissed me twice;  
But, when I groped for you  
You went away.  
Now, while long evening hills  
Ride down the west,  
Like caravans of opal  
Sunset bound,  
Pulling the dusty dark along the dew;  
Million-tongued and strange,  
You summon me.  
And I must quench my fire,  
And follow you.

## ALTERNATIVES

**O**H, Time will break us as he has the others.  
The beautiful and strong, the gay, the proud,  
Between the cradling breasts of their two mothers  
Have sung their weary hearts out to the crowd.  
Rich in a metal that no mint may utter,  
They struck hot, molten youth into a song;  
And, with it, won the solace of the gutter—  
Villon, and Poe, and all the lonely throng.

And here today, while our own songs, unsung,  
Still hum, pent fire, in our quick arteries;  
While the sweet agony of being young  
Is ours, and this pollen-heavy breeze  
Has loosed your hair, and fanned a sudden flame,  
I wonder so—I falter on your name.

## INTERLUDE

**B**REATHE very gently now, and you can feel it  
Stirring between our palms, reluctant to stay.  
See, they have passed in the storm, and their lanterns are  
fading.

Now it is ours until the dawn takes it away.

Close your eyes tightly now, in the veiled starlight—  
Eyes that have learned to see too cruelly clear.  
Only the blind are wise: our fingers may slacken;  
Then, if we look, we may find but emptiness there.

Press very closely now, that we may hold it  
Between our hearts. See, the darkness blooms suddenly  
warm.

When we awake our hands will be open and empty.  
Then, seeker and dreamer again, we will bend to the  
storm.

## TWO POEMS

### I

#### APRIL

WHEN we are older  
We can be tender.  
Now, with the splendor  
Of April about us,  
While we are bolder  
Than our doubters,  
There is a planet  
I must acquire  
Before they can ban it.  
While this swift fire  
Leaps in your laughter,  
You must be after  
Your moon.

#### In November

We will be older,  
Sadder—colder;  
Then we'll remember  
Your head, and my shoulder.

## NOVEMBER

I could forget your face,  
And the slow gathering comfort of your smile.  
The cold white fire of your slender hand  
Kept me remembering a little while;  
But there was much to know and understand,  
To puzzle out and trace.

I could even forget the way  
You laughed and tossed your head to hide the pain  
That April morning when you let me go.  
Strong with the strength to conquer heart with brain,  
I crushed you swiftly out; and did not know  
That I must ever pay.

I should not have come  
Back to these dunes and sky that never alter,  
The sweeping condemnation of this sea  
We loved together. Here at last I falter,  
Tortured and broken by the tyranny  
Of things unknowing, dumb.

## SPRING MOOD

**I** CANNOT bear the park today;  
The children, and the sad old men on benches;  
Spring greedily devouring decay  
That was an Autumn,  
Generous, and passionate, and strong;  
A sun too cruel-bright, that drenches  
The little walled-in square,  
And warms young buoyant hope  
On energy it draws from old despair.  
Bright waves of children break about the old,  
Laugh, and recede more joyous than they came.  
The sitters on the benches  
Stir and shift uneasily,  
Cackle, scold,  
And dwindle visibly.

A callous wind  
Hums a gay stave or two,  
Then brooms a whirl of leaves.  
Helpless, they circle, mutter, and subside.  
Like tongues of flame,  
Young grass leaps flickering through.

And suddenly the mask slips.  
Under the color and the sun,

The hideous, irrevocable plan  
Works nakedly.  
Youth, with its lips  
Red from the carcasses of age,  
Now, as when time began,  
Makes of the quiet square a charnel cage.

Tomorrow I may love my park again.  
Now, I must get hence, and be alone  
Among the shouldering millions,  
To breathe where man entrenches  
Himself with gods and stone  
To shut out death.  
I cannot bear the park today;  
The children, and the sad old men on benches.

## NEW ENGLAND LANDSCAPE

ON a sepia ground  
Shot with orange light,  
The pines,  
In blue-black lines,  
And birches, slender,  
Diagonal, and white,  
Stencil compact designs.  
The inevitable wall,  
As it leaves the woods,  
Breaks to a sprawl  
Of separate stones  
Echoing the tones  
Of sepia and orange  
With high lights  
Of chrome and red,  
Until they find a bed  
In the splotched lilac  
Of the meadow,  
Or chill to blue in shadow.  
In the valley's cupped palm  
Lies a handful of ripening grain.  
And, riding the high blue calm  
Over Monadnock,  
A decorous cloud  
Is slowly unwinding its skein.

## MATINS

I SAW you pray today  
Out in the park,  
Storm-driven child  
Of the nethermost dark.

Body to earth you lay  
On the young grass,  
Learning the shining way  
April may pass.

I saw the clear song  
Cardinals make  
Brush your face tangibly  
Like wind on the lake.

Then, in the hedge  
Where japonicas grew,  
A little breeze was born,  
Boyish and new.

I saw it find you  
And rustle your name;  
Lift you, and carry you  
Like a slim flame

Out where the trees break,  
Leaving wide skies.  
Now I see always  
The prayer in your eyes.

## SUFFRAGE

THE mother in her was the last to die  
In the strong chains of “What will neighbors say!”  
She could have painted; and she’d make you cry,  
Singing familiar songs her different way.  
But vaguely art connoted blasphemy  
And idleness. She could have married Will,  
And reared his young above the grocery.  
But something in her sang that he would kill.

At thirty-five *he* came; and then the day  
He drew her close; but told her of old ties—  
Yet there was France—and love. She turned away,  
For Heaven fastened her with watchful eyes.

The women at the polls all swear her daft.  
Today she tore her vote to bits—*and laughed.*

## WEARINESS

I DO not dread the coming of Old Age:  
I am so tired today—so wholly spent.  
Kind hands are suddenly belligerent.  
“If you lack strength to earn your daily wage,  
Give us your soul,” they cry, “your heritage  
Of pride.” Revengeful winds that I have bent  
Before my body’s strength, finding me impotent,  
Lash me to cover with their blinding rage.

Now, if the form that I have always feared  
Should take my nerveless hand, and, like a friend,  
Say “Come and rest a while. Forget the mad  
And futile fight—the thinking that you cared—  
The shout—the kiss. Come, dream until the end  
Here with me in the sun,” I could be glad.

## AUTUMN MOOD

**S**UMMER, come home.  
Wreckage of crimson and chrome  
On your moist green floor of mosses . . .  
Sunlight that Autumn has turned  
From copper to brass  
Thrusting slim bars through the dome  
That October has shattered  
And spurned.  
The fragile, intricate house  
That you reared for your reticent soul  
Is open and battered,  
Shaken in beam, and in rafter;  
Nothing is whole.  
See in the cynical light  
The tale of your losses.  
Winds lift ironical laughter.  
Nothing has mattered.  
*Come home.*

## AFTERMATH

To Edward L. Wells. Killed in Action.

WHEN, in the darkest hour of our dark night,  
You took the sum of all you had to give,  
Your splendid body, with its right to live,  
Your soaring mind, with all its latent might,  
And hurled it with a shout into the fight;  
I could have wept that you would never see  
The triumph of the dream that seemed to be  
Upon you and about you like a light.

Now, while our boastful triumph shakes the dawn,  
Revenge and greed have cast their cloaks aside,  
The people perish, and we waste our breath;  
All those who dared to dream are laughed to scorn,  
While, one by one, their dreams are crucified:  
Almost I envy you your rich, young death.

## INVOCATION

**A** H, Life, press close thy passionate lips to mine  
Before we part;  
And let thy mad, ecstatic hunger throb  
Through all my heart.

Oh, haste the flood-tide of thy glorious youth  
Through my slow veins,  
And strike this deadening palsy from my limbs  
With quickening pains.

Then send me lilting, vibrant with thy song,  
Upon the course that thou hast charted out.  
And give me all the tasks the weaklings shun;  
That triumphing, I prove beyond all doubt

The high invincibility of Thee.  
And when my work is done, in Heaven's name  
Oh, leave me not to flicker back to Thee  
A feeble, ever-dying little flame.

But take me with a challenge in my throat,  
Clear-eyed and lusty, eager for the strife—  
Bursting all bonds for sheer excess of Thee;  
Then hurl me thrilling into keener Life.

## HORIZONS

“ Sky that knows no trammels but the sea,  
And a low range of far tide-bitten dunes.”

Poems of the South Carolina Low Country.



## HORIZONS

**T**HIS sun-drugged land of ours,  
Huge, tawny-limbed, low-breasted like a man,  
Sprawling in indolence among sea-nurtured flowers,  
Dreaming a dream that started  
When the first dawn began;  
Impersonal as lust,  
As fiercely taking;  
Holding us until the last  
Sharp awful breaking,  
Then closing sleepy fingers on our dust.

Why should we give it all!  
Why should we bring  
Swift pulses, shackled dreams,  
White early love!  
Wall beyond lifted wall  
The Andes swing  
Their tilted beauty.  
Still Gobi and Sahara pale and flare.  
Alaskan stars on snow  
Call bitter-clear.  
And one may know  
The transient solace of old, chiseled stone,

And many a girl Madonna,  
Many a saint,  
Fixed for a heart-beat in a square of paint.

I have said, "I will go.  
Another sun will see me freed  
Of this old torrid passion.  
But, for tonight, I have a need  
To rest on warm brown sand,  
And watch the slow  
Dark breaker of the night  
Gather and grow,  
Topple against the west,  
Then break, and race  
Under its spray of stars  
To beach on space;  
Leaving the east behind it  
Washed and white."

Then, while I lie, resolved,  
And wait for day;  
Across the low-hung moon  
Late curlews sway  
The trailing pennant  
Of their silent flight.  
Slowly they curve,  
And then come streaming back  
Across the yellow disc,  
Low on the water like a riding-light,  
Then out to sea along the copper track.

That only—nothing more:  
Late curlews—and a later moon.

Yet, when the sun  
Calls the blue heron out to wade the creek,  
While alligators boom a sunrise gun  
In the dark swamp,  
And many-tongued, the waking marshes speak;  
I know again that I have been undone.

### Undone!

To dream a whirl of years away  
Beneath their tireless spin of suns and moons,  
To feel my body drinking, deep and free,  
Of sky that knows no trammels but the sea:  
And a low range of far tide-bitten dunes.

### Undone!

To stumble on a vacant shore  
That has been busy with its urgent life,  
And given of its wealth to taking hands.  
And watch the sea returning for its own,  
Trampling earth ramparts into fluid sands,  
Heaping a forest skyward, bone on bone,  
Until the equinox shall sweep it bare.

### Undone!

To feel immensity bend near  
And lay its weight on me;  
While wind, clean from another sphere,  
Blows by like pitying laughter.  
Then silence—aching—long—  
And after,  
The raw irony  
Of spending soul and brain upon a song.

## Undone!

And yet I know that I shall stay;  
Asking but life outside of city walls,  
Tides and savannas,  
And the aimless sway  
Of far curlews,  
A solitary heron voyaging south,  
The ocean's wide, innumerable blues,  
And the sweet bitterness  
Of salt upon my mouth.  
For these are life,  
And when they pass from me,  
Leaving me stricken and uncomforted,  
Although I still may hold the avid ground  
Beneath my feet, and thrill to sight and sound,  
I shall most surely know that I am dead.

## RETURN

THE spent day dwindle west along the strand.  
Wide-ranging sea-winds veer and circle home,  
Trailing slow pinions, luminous where foam  
Breaks to their touch. Now the last gust of sand  
Goes stinging by ; and where the myrtles stand,  
Wind-shorn and huddled in the lee of dunes,  
The sleepy wings bruise leaves till evening swoons  
With drowsy perfume, and sleep folds the land.

So I would come again where loved things are,  
An æon hence, after my voyaging.  
When I have tired of the last wild star  
And winds set homeward, I would turn and fling  
My length beside these dunes, and know again  
The night's deep solace, and the myrtle's pain.

## BUZZARD ISLAND

**A** FRIEZE of naked limbs, gaunt, sinister,  
Against the sanguine anguish of the west.  
No sound except the steady cluck and purr  
Of thirsty streams that tap the sky's bared breast,  
And crawl through blind canals until they flood  
The barren levels of the empty fields,  
The fallen dikes, the rotting trunks with blood.

Now, as the fading horror swoons tonight,  
Like cinders scattered from a funeral pyre,  
Coursing and veering in the upper light,  
With bellies ruddy from the ebbing fire,  
The vultures circle down until their breath  
Poisons the stagnant air, until the stark  
Awaiting trees blossom and leaf with death.

Beyond these rice-fields and their crawling streams,  
Young voices ring; white cities lift and spread.  
This is the rookery of still-born dreams;  
Here old faiths gather after they are dead,  
Outlived despairs slant by on evil wing,  
And bitter memories that time has starved  
Home down the closing dusk for comforting.

NOTE: Buzzard Island is a buzzard rookery among abandoned rice-fields on the coast of South Carolina.

## THE EQUINOX

**H**EAVY with salt, and warm,  
And damp from the Caribbean,  
Like a wrestler's body  
Muscled under its sweat;  
Sounding a deep alarm  
That shrills to a pæan,  
It charges the shuddering spit  
Where the rivers have met.

Under its whirling cloak  
The hummocks and houses are shrunken  
To figures of fear  
In the blue-green daylight-dark.  
Only a dwarfed sea-oak  
Leans truculent, drunken,  
Brandishing terrible arms  
That wind-bludgeons leave stark.

From the demoniac vault  
Gargantuan sledges  
Crash to the huddling roofs  
Until frail timbers start.  
Then thundering to the assault  
Like surf on the ledges,

The weight of the wind drives through  
And rends them apart.

Now the palmettoes that lash  
On the southern-most beaches  
Thrill to the shout of the storm  
And sing through the rain.  
Remembering typhoons that smash  
Along tropical reaches,  
They batter the winds with great hands,  
And are happy again.

## CHANT FOR AN OLD TOWN

*BUILDERS of high white towers in the sun;  
Masters, yet driven by the force you spend;  
Can you not feel beneath the soil you rend  
A surer rhythm than you have yet begun:  
The drum of steady pulses that have done  
With stone and iron, colors, and the bend  
Of certain beauty; workers, friend and friend,  
Whose hands wrought slowly until grace was won.*

*Trading new lamps for old, you storm the street.  
Then, heedless of the magic in the old,  
You leave them strewn in fragments at our gate.  
Oh, pause before the ruin is complete.  
For that which stands have pity, and withhold.  
Leave for your sons these walls inviolate.*

It has been told above the fading embers  
That once beneath a cloud-wracked, frightened moon,  
When the Governor's ships drove down upon the pirates,  
And days were numbered for the picaroon,  
A long-boat swept from sea toward the city,  
Slender, and dark, and eager as a sword,  
Cleaving the swirling play of light and shadow  
That made the bay a crazy checker-board.

And once the light drenched down and limned a picture  
That caused the blood to stagger, hang, and freeze;  
For the boat leapt clear, and in the stern sat Blackbeard  
Nursing a bloody cutlass on his knees.

And the watchers paled and shifted in the darkness,  
Hugging the shadows when the moon flared through;  
For the ships were out, and gaunt below the city  
Stood gibbets that had swung a pirate crew;  
While a Judas wind went whispering among them,  
And bent palmettoes muttered all they knew.

But the drone of parted water never slackened.  
The splash of oars and tumble of the wake  
Dwindled and ebbed along the windy river,  
And died at the city's edge where forests break.  
And silence fluttered back from the hidden marshes,  
Throbbed, and bore upon them like an ache.

But the negroes tell of a silent landing-party  
That hacked a path through tangled scrub and vine,  
And a long-boat beached where greying live-oaks crowded  
About a creek to dabble their beards in brine.

Of a sullen torch that splashed vermillion patches  
On a face from Hell, and sweat upon the backs  
Of diggers working heavily in silence;  
And a chest borne down by two great straining blacks  
Into a yawning hole. Then color of fire  
Poured from a sudden blade to the stooping men  
Terribly cleaving souls from splendid bodies;  
And a voice: "Guard well until I come again."

Darkness then, and the heavy rhythmic thudding  
Of sods on wood and the flesh of those on guard;  
A hush that built about them slowly, stilling  
Even a distant pulse where tholepins jarred.

2

A gust of years went by, and then the blowing  
Of steady decades kind to a new land.  
Like a spent storm, the head of Blackbeard glowered  
Through rainbows at a frigate's prow, while sand  
And the terrible strong teeth of deep-sea hunters  
Fretted the tarnished cutlass from his hand.

Streets spread, and quiet forest paths receded.  
Men built with hands that loved the feel of stone,  
And hearts that knew elusive ways of Beauty,  
Who mates a loving touch—or lives alone.  
Where forests fell the grateful soil reflowered  
In slender portico and stuccoed wall.  
Old stones from France lay in the narrow driveways,  
And through their crevices the many small  
Sweet fingers of the Spring would lift unhindered.  
Summer would mount there like a tropic wave  
Spilling pomegranate coral through the gardens.

There figs, sea-purple, ripened, and the brave  
Old tattered banners of bananas fluttered  
About their heavy fruit. White mornings sprawled  
On wharves that loved the bay, where chanties rang;  
And August courtyards, flagged and lichen-walled,  
Where negroes bought and sold, and laughed and sang.  
Above deep streets hung weathered copper spires  
And domes to take the sun, and, like a crowd  
Of patient watchers over fading splendors,  
High toppling dormers, staring shaggy-browed.  
Cowled doorways bore the chisel's mark upon them,  
And iron-work in many a harp and scroll,  
Beaten by hands that shaped red yielding metal,  
Still bore the fleeting imprint of a soul.

But there are things that human clay may handle,  
And warm its coldness on, and speed its breath  
For one brief day. Then, like a flaring candle,  
They go. Beauty is such. The seed of death  
Is born in lovely things to ripen slowly  
And kill them before we are satisfied.  
Only the dead are free to give up wholly,  
And follow mortal beauty that has died.

### 3

The engines come.  
Through the short night  
They breathe their iron breathing,  
Waiting the dawn.  
Then *snarl*, and

SHATTER, SHATTER, SHATTER!

*"Frail city of hands,  
What have you to offer?"*

*Can you prove by mathematics  
Why you should survive?  
Pierced by plunging caissons,  
Walled by towering concrete;  
What have you to compare  
With the superb accuracy  
Of a blue-print,  
Or the relentless convergence  
Of a studied perspective?  
Can you give us a sea-wall  
Like that of Buenos Aires,  
Or a hotel the mate to twenty others  
In great American cities?  
A hundred Western towns say you are wrong;  
And in answer  
You smile your faded, wistful smile,  
And show us a crooked, moss-hung tree  
A century old;  
And the way a street  
Bends a protecting arm  
About an impossible curve.*

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SHATTER, SHATTER, SHATTER!

*See how a house can climb  
Sheer to the zenith,  
Floor hurled upon floor,  
While the girders swing dizzily upward.  
We show you a street like  
Pennsylvania Avenue,  
Canal Street,  
Riverside Drive,  
All asphalt and uniform concrete.  
And you dodder of ancient flagged pavements  
That lay like faint pastel mosaics*

*Between careless gardens  
That were like nothing else upon Earth.*

SHATTER, SHATTER, SHATTER!  
*Ah, you are silent at last."*

4

Under the feet of a tall machine,  
In the false and tricky dark  
That grew where the sky-flung derricks lean  
Over the littered park,

A gang of negroes burrowing  
With bar, and pick, and spade,  
Tugged and bent to an iron ring  
In a hole their tools had made.

A sudden give, and the earth fell clear,  
A gasp, and seven blacks  
Bunched and cringed, and muttered a prayer  
To the thing behind their backs.

For a moon grown suddenly old and blue  
Laid withered hands upon  
A mouldy chest, and a bone or two  
From a rotting skeleton;

A shooting-star whined overhead,  
The arc-lights winced and failed,  
And a lonely wind from the longtime dead  
Crept to their ears and wailed.

Then Terror loosed them, and let them go  
In a storm of flailing feet,  
To tell their tale by the lantern glow  
Of the shops in Sailor Street.

But when the engines summoned day  
Up from oblivion,  
And the gang crept back to loot the clay,  
The chest and the bones were gone.

5

Simon, the drunkard, swears he saw them going,  
In a shaking world of neither-here-nor-there,  
Tottering out of the shades, and slowly blowing  
Across the park, lighter than harbor air,  
With a wedge of the milky-way serenely showing  
Through cloven skulls under the matted hair.

Yes, he will tell you that he watched them travel  
Out to the city's edge with a mouldy chest.  
How they would bulk in the dark, and then unravel  
Under the lights. And when they paused to rest,  
Dusted their burden free of city gravel,  
And waited tense, lest any should molest.

Heaving their treasure to their backs, they waded  
The last salt stream, and, where the forests keep  
The old lost darks and silences, they faded.

\*       \*       \*       \*       \*

Back in the early grey, steel-throated, deep,  
The engines ripped the silence, and the jaded,  
Driven city stumbled from its sleep.

## ENVOY

**S**O, at the last, I think that we must follow,  
When Death has struck us free to dream and rest;  
When the great engines rock the world about us,  
And sow bright, bitter cities down the West.  
Then we may go, we who have guarded Beauty  
Hidden from eyes that were not taught to see,  
Out to the city's edge, in the covering night-time,  
Bearing a ghostly treasure secretly.  
And those who meet us in the echoing silence  
Will neither challenge us nor stay our pace.  
For our shimmering store would fetch no silver  
Under the sun in any market-place.  
Only the sky will know us, and the silence,  
And the great cloud-leviathans that spawn  
Their sullen young beyond the smoking marshes  
To range the painted ocean of the dawn.  
Time will flow by us then like a wide blue river.  
But we will never heed its steady pull,  
Nor mourn the tragic freightage that it carries,  
Broken, but beautiful.  
We will hold fast against the crowding shadows,  
Late and soon,  
Beauties that breath built tenderly at sunrise,  
To fade at noon.

These we will hoard, and treasure, and remember;  
Waiting dead captains who will never come,  
Statesmen, and dreamers, workers with taut sinews,  
Who builded Beauty here, and called it *home*.

## EPITAPH FOR A POET

**H**ERE lies a spendthrift who believed  
That only those who spend may keep;  
Who scattered seeds, yet never grieved  
Because a stranger came to reap;

A failure who might well have risen;  
Yet, ragged, sang exultantly  
That all success is but a prison,  
And only those who fail are free:

Who took what little Earth had given,  
And watched it blaze, and watched it die;  
Who could not see a distant Heaven  
Because of dazzling nearer sky;

Who never flinched till Earth had taken  
The most of him back home again,  
And the last silences were shaken  
With songs too lovely for his pen.















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